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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [OSCE](#) [GG](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTH OSSETIA: AN "AMUSING" MEETING GETS NOWHERE

Classified By: PolMinCouns Alice Wells. Reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) The Joint Control Commission to negotiate a settlement in the South Ossetia conflict met in Moscow August 17-18 and produced no results. The meeting's main accomplishment was to continue over the full two days without breaking up in acrimony. Georgian DCM Shugarov told us August 18, while the meeting was still in progress, that this was due to the "calmer," "less emotional" style of new Georgian Minister for Conflict Resolution Merab Antadze.

¶2. (C) The South Ossetian side, Shugarov said, wanted to move on the JCC's previous decision to name a working group to unite the Georgian and Ossetian proposals for a peace plan. The Georgian side rejected this on grounds that the format of the JCC itself needed to be widened before undertaking any other work. The Russians and Ossetians defended the current format (the JCC includes representatives of Georgia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia and Russia), saying that it had "not exhausted its potential," as Russian DFM Karasin put when he opened the meeting.

¶3. (C) Russian JCC negotiator Yuriy Popov told us the two days' proceedings were "amusing," but gave no grounds for optimism. The Georgians -- "your partners," he called them -- "intend to bury the existing format," even if it means stopping any work on a peace plan that both sides can agree to use as the basis for negotiations. "Even the OSCE and EU were puzzled," Popov added.

¶4. (C) Comment: Judging by Shugarov's tone, the Georgian Embassy in Moscow was equally puzzled by the new Georgian linkage. Meanwhile, the Russians clearly believe the U.S. put its "partners" the Georgians up to holding a peace plan hostage to reform of the JCC. At the same time, the Russians probably do find the Georgian position "amusing," as it stops all progress while making the Georgians look recalcitrant -- a perfect outcome, from their point of view.
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